

Columbia: Our Additional Commitments to Combatting Antisemitism

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<https://president.columbia.edu/news/our-additional-commitments-combatting-antisemitism>

Dear members of the Columbia community,

In recent weeks, in anticipation of the fall semester, my focus has been on the work we can do to support a civil, tolerant, flourishing community at Columbia. A place where all feel welcome, where different viewpoints, different ideas, can be shared respectfully, and where, therefore, deep intellectual vibrancy is possible. Many efforts are underway, and you will be hearing more about all of them in the coming weeks.

Our work toward an agreement with the federal government has put a harsh spotlight on many of the difficult issues regarding discrimination and harassment we've seen on our campuses. The fact that we've faced pressure from the government does not make the problems on our campuses any less real; a significant part of our community has been deeply affected in negative ways. In my view, any government agreement we reach is only a starting point for change. Committing to reform on our own is a more powerful path. It will better enable us to recognize our shortcomings and create lasting change.

Today, I write to you, specifically, about our ongoing efforts to combat antisemitism. There is no place for intimidation, hateful language, or targeting of Jews or Israelis at Columbia, and we have zero tolerance for this behavior. Over the last year, guided by our principles of academic freedom, inclusion, and respect, and the important work of our Antisemitism Task Force, we have enacted meaningful reforms, understanding that more would be needed. After deep consultation with our Jewish community, and many friends and experts outside of our institution, we are taking some important additional steps.

International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Definition of Antisemitism

As part of our March 21st commitments, Columbia announced we would incorporate the definition of antisemitism, as recommended by our Antisemitism Task Force in August 2024, into our anti-discrimination policies. We felt then, as we do now, that it is important to use a definition of antisemitism that reflects the experiences of many within Columbia's Jewish community. Our Task Force had recommended that definition for use in education and pedagogy. While we remain committed to that carefully constructed definition, we are today also formally incorporating the IHRA definition of antisemitism into the work of our Office of Institutional Equity (OIE), housed under the Office of the Provost.

While OIE has operated in a manner consistent with applicable regulations and guidance from the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR), including OCR's 2021 and 2024 guidance, the formal incorporation of this definition will strengthen our response to and our community's understanding of modern antisemitism. That guidance directs schools to consider the IHRA definition of antisemitism and its accompanying examples to the extent that any such examples might be useful as evidence of discriminatory intent. The IHRA definition is similarly used by many universities

and colleges across the country.

Columbia is committed to taking all possible steps to combat antisemitism and the University remains dedicated to ensuring that complaints of discrimination and harassment of all types, including complaints based on Jewish and Israeli identity, are treated in the same manner. Formally adding the consideration of the IHRA definition into our existing anti-discrimination policies strengthens our approach to combating antisemitism.

Appoint Title VI and Title VII Coordinators

Columbia will appoint Title VI and Title VII Coordinators to review and respond to allegations under University policies implementing the requirements of Title VI and Title VII, ensuring compliance with the laws' prohibition of discrimination, based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin, as well as its prohibition on retaliation. The coordinators will be part of the OIE and will have both advising and enforcement responsibilities. We believe the addition of these positions will ensure swift attention and action on complaints about violations of these policies.

Additionally, these coordinators will contribute to a publicly available annual report to University leadership and the Board of Trustees, which will be part of a broader OIE annual report and will include reporting on Title VI and Title VII complaints, investigations, and outcomes. We hope this expanded annual report will give our community confidence that our systems addressing discrimination and harassment on our campuses are working.

Additional Training on Antisemitism

In addition to the existing Title VI antidiscrimination training—which specifically addresses antisemitism and is required of all students, faculty, and staff—we believe that supporting a deeper education on antisemitism is critical. Over the last six months, after extraordinarily thoughtful and often painful conversations with leaders from our own Jewish community, and nationally and internationally, it's become clear that ongoing educational work will be the most critical and consequential of all our efforts to combat antisemitism. Implementing meaningful educational programs that engage not only our students, but also our faculty and staff, will have the most lasting impact, and they will also take the most time and effort.

To begin, we are initiating programming and training partnerships with several national Jewish organizations including Project Shema, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), the Foundation to Combat Antisemitism, and Kalaniyot; we are also exploring a cooperation with Yad Vashem. We hope to engage our community, in many ways, in an ongoing dialogue on the roots of antisemitism and its modern forms. These partnerships are intended to bring our community together and foster a greater understanding of these issues using tools we value at Columbia—education and respectful conversation.

We are also collaborating with Interfaith America, the Constructive Dialogue Institute, and StoryCorps' One Small Step program to build programs that will go beyond traditional trainings, and the focus on antisemitism, to build bridges more broadly, to create constructive dialogue, and to deepen our understanding of each other.

Affirmation of Zero Tolerance

I want to reiterate that the University has zero tolerance for discrimination and harassment based on protected traits, including Jewish and Israeli identity. And while our University Rules and Policies are well-defined on this matter, beginning this 2025-26 academic year, Columbia will make clear our “Zero Tolerance for Antisemitism and Hate” in regular community messages.

As part of this initiative, Columbia has not, and will not, recognize or meet with the group that calls itself “Columbia University Apartheid Divest” (CUAD), its representatives, or any of its affiliated organizations. Organizations that promote violence or encourage disruptions of our academic mission are not welcome on our campuses and the University will not engage with them.

I am so grateful to the many community members who have given so generously of their time to offer their deep concerns and constructive and critical ideas. I would also add that making these announcements in no way suggests we are finished with the work. In a recent discussion, a faculty member and I agreed that antisemitism at this institution has existed, perhaps less overtly, for a long while, and the work of dismantling it, especially through education and understanding, will take time. It will likely require more reform. But I’m hopeful that in doing this work, as we consider and even debate it, we will start to promote healing and to chart our path forward.

Sincerely,

Claire Shipman

Acting President, Columbia University in the City of New York